

# Early Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*: Two Case Histories

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In recent studies of Byzantine political comment and particularly of opposition to imperial policy the period after Justinian has received a certain amount of space.<sup>1</sup> But the reigns of Justin II and Tiberius II are still neglected by comparison with that of their predecessor,<sup>2</sup> while the spell exercised by Procopius's *Secret History* tends to dominate all approaches to contemporary political attitudes.<sup>3</sup> The fascination of the *Secret History* for modern scholars<sup>4</sup> has, too, inclined them to look only at the negative aspects of political criticism, and to fix their attention on what seem to be 'mainstream' writers in the tradition of Procopian history.<sup>5</sup> I want here to try to

1. See F. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (Munich, 1971); B. Rubin, 'Zur Kaiserkritik Ostroms', *Studi bizantini e neoellenici (Atti dell' VIII congresso internazionale di studi bizantini, Palermo, 1951)*, VII (1953), 453ff.; *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, I (Berlin, 1960), pp. 227ff.; Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 124ff.

2. For Justin II see K. Groh, *Geschichte des oströmischen Kaisers Justin II nebst den Quellen*, Diss. Halle (Leipzig, 1889); E. Stein, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Reiches, vornehmlich unter Kaisern Justinus II und Tiberius Constantinus* (Stuttgart, 1919); for Tiberius II the best account is still probably J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene II* (London, 1889), pp. 79ff. [hereafter *LRE*].

3. So Tinnefeld and Rubin [n. 1].

4. See especially S. Mazzarino, *The End of the Ancient World* (Eng. trans., London, 1966), pp. 102ff. and almost all books on the age of Justinian, from Gibbon on.

5. So conspicuously Tinnefeld [n. 1]; the omission of John of Ephesus from his survey creates a serious imbalance. On Procopian history see Cameron, *Agathias* [n. 1], pp. 30ff. and *passim*.

demonstrate the limitations of such an approach by means of an analysis of the literary sources available for these two reigns. It may be that in the end both reigns must remain imperfectly understood;<sup>6</sup> yet the policies and character of the unhappy Justin II evoked violent excesses of praise and blame and provided an inevitable foil for the well-meaning and amiable Tiberius. *Kaiserkritik* in East Rome is a concept which needs closer study, and the history of this short period demonstrates that it must be sought in a range of sources which genuinely reflects the spectrum of Byzantine life. There were certain common literary features about the critique of emperors in more formal political works; but political criticism did not confine itself to classical histories, and I suspect that the attitudes revealed by the more popular sources are more interesting and more important. Modern study of Byzantine *Kaiserkritik* has been neither sufficiently wide-ranging in scope nor sensitive enough to the interaction of genuine opinion with literary form.

This paper then falls into two sections, first a survey of the literary sources for Justin II and Tiberius (a necessary introduction in itself to a neglected period), then an attempt to indicate some of the lessons which such an analysis can teach us about the general concept of Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*.

## I

The work of certain authors is known only by allusion or from fragments. Thus one Cyrus of Batna (seemingly contemporary) wrote a history of Justin II and Tiberius in Syriac, which may have been used by the twelfth-century Michael the Syrian.<sup>7</sup> Doubtless it presented Justin from an Eastern Monophysite point of view, as a persecutor; whether it carried Michael's emphasis on Justin's moderate beginnings we cannot tell.<sup>8</sup> Then

6. So Stein, *Studien* [n. 2], p. 1.

7. See J.-B. Chabot (ed.), *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, I (Paris, 1924), intro. p. xxxi.

8. On Michael's account of Justin's policies see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 317ff.; Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', *Studies in Church History*, XIII (Oxford, 1976), 51–67.

Theophanes of Byzantium, as we know from Photius,<sup>9</sup> composed ten books also on Justin II and Tiberius, apparently concentrating on the Persian wars. No expression of opinion is to be found in Photius's summary, however. Evagrius tells us<sup>10</sup> that Agathias and John of Epiphaneia together continued Procopius up to A.D. 590, the year of the flight of Chosroes II to Roman territory; he seems to mean that John's narrative followed on where that of Agathias left off, that is, from A.D. 559. But the opening of John's work indicates that his main topic too will be the wars with Persia; he begins with the accession of Justin and passes quickly to the renewal of hostilities. His claim to credibility is based on having been secretary (*σύμβουλος*) to the Patriarch Gregory of Antioch and having taken part with him in the negotiations with Chosroes II and Persian leaders, even visiting Persia himself;<sup>11</sup> perhaps then his history would have been relatively limited in scope. But although most of his allusions to Justin in the extant fragments are quite neutral, he does deliver himself of one emphatic *mot*, namely that Justin's appointment of Tiberius as Caesar after the onset of illness was the best thing he ever did, and the source of great good to the empire.<sup>12</sup>

Justin, whose reign began with the murder of a rival,<sup>13</sup> who was dominated by his wife<sup>14</sup> and went mad after his reckless renewal of the war with Persia had resulted in the loss of Dara,<sup>15</sup> aroused deep hostility and contempt in many of his subjects, and for a mixture of reasons, as we shall see. But there were also those who supported the regime and the emperor, and it will be helpful to try to categorize their evidence. In the first place imperial panegyric is well represented. Agathias's *Cycle* of contemporary epigrams, now integrated into the Palatine Anthology, was published during this reign, and the

9. *Bibliotheca*, cod. 64 (C. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, IV [repr. Paris, 1928], 270f.) [hereafter *FHG*].

10. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London, 1898), V.24 [hereafter *HE*].

11. *FHG*, IV.273.

12. *FHG*, IV.276.

13. John of Biclar, *Chronica* (ed. Mommsen, *MGH*, auct. ant. XI [1894]), a. 568(?); Evagrius, *HE*, V.1–2; Agathias, *Hist.*, IV.32

14. See Averil Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', *B*, XLV (1975), 5–21.

15. Evagrius, *HE*, V.11.

introductory poem (*AP* IV.3) must be regarded as an example of imperial panegyric addressed to Justin.<sup>16</sup> Its main themes are the seemingly inappropriate ones of victory and triumph—yet for a newly ascended emperor these depersonalized motifs were the most suitable. Not much could yet be said about Justin himself, so the poet has recourse to the set themes of Byzantine imperial ideology.<sup>17</sup> There were other, more formally correct panegyrics, in both Latin and Greek, recited in public when Justin took his first consulship on 1 January 566.<sup>18</sup> And we still possess a work that was perhaps more ambitious than these—Corippus's hybrid epic-panegyric describing Justin's accession and coronation, the Avar embassy of late November, A.D. 565, and the consular inauguration.<sup>19</sup> Like Agathias's preface, though on a far larger scale, Corippus draws on the standard imperial *topoi*, and much of the poem uses stereotypes of imperial triumph on the one hand and the emperor's relation to God on the other which would have been applicable not merely to Justin II but to *any* emperor.<sup>20</sup> It would be dangerous to use this alone from which to argue a special piety in Justin or a special emphasis on the religious side of the imperial role.<sup>21</sup> But there is material in Corippus's poem of a more realistic kind, which does give hard historical data: Justin's financial policies announced in his inauguration speech, for example,<sup>22</sup> the portrayal of his most influential supporters, Tiberius, Callinicus, Anastasius the *quaestor* and the Patriarch John Scholasticus, which tallies perfectly with the version of John of Ephesus,<sup>23</sup> the tendentious account of Justin's accession<sup>24</sup> and

16. See Averil and Alan Cameron, 'The Cycle of Agathias', *JHS*, LXXXVI (1966), 6ff.; LXXXVII (1967), 131; Cameron, *Agathias*, pp. 12ff.

17. Cameron, *Agathias*, pp. 14f.

18. Corippus, *In laudem Iustini*, IV.154f.

19. *In laudem Iustini minoris* I–IV, now edited with introduction, translation and commentary by Averil Cameron (London, 1976).

20. See especially, *Iust.*, *pref.* and II.147, f., 407f. with my notes.

21. But see below, pp. 6f.

22. Corippus, *Iust.* II.249ff.; see *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, XIII (1966), 101ff. and below, p. 10.

23. Tiberius: I.212f., IV.374f.; Callinicus: I.78f., IV.332f. Anastasius: *Pan. Anast.* 26f.; John Scholasticus: II.159f. For John of Ephesus, see below, pp. 11ff.

24. I.1ff., with my notes.

the revelation of the senate's *coup* in accomplishing the inauguration procedures inside the palace so as to forestall any popular or factional demonstrations in the Hippodrome.<sup>25</sup> Corippus was hoping for favour from the powerful Anastasius; as a member of the imperial bureaucracy he was evidently writing as an eye-witness, and within a year or so of the events.<sup>26</sup> There is a good deal in the poem that is direct and authentic; but it was all written with an end in view and—to some extent at least—according to a pattern. Two more contemporary poems are also semi-official in character. Some Greek verses celebrating the arrival of an icon of Justin in Alexandria<sup>27</sup> hail Justin in conventionally panegyric terms. There is more solidity in the poem which Venantius Fortunatus wrote to thank Justin and Sophia for their gift of a fragment of the True Cross to the convent of Radegund at Poitiers.<sup>28</sup> Thus we learn from it that Justin at his accession released the exiled bishops.<sup>29</sup> But Venantius's praise of Justin's orthodoxy is in part at least merely the expected reaction of a Westerner who saw the Byzantine Emperor making a pious gesture to the Catholic Franks. Justin had ordered the Creed of Constantinople to be sung in all churches<sup>30</sup> and this must be the reference of Venantius's assertion that Justin has restored the orthodox faith;<sup>31</sup> but Venantius was already settled in Poitiers and knew the Eastern capital only from travellers' tales. His fulsome praise of the religious attitudes of Justin and Sophia must owe more to wishful thinking than to precise knowledge.

This class of favourable sources for Justin II must then be used with caution. A different strand altogether is represented by the chronicler Theophanes. For him Justin is chiefly remarkable for his piety,<sup>32</sup> which manifests itself above all in the

25. II.84ff., with notes.

26. For the date of composition see Cameron [n. 19], intro., (i); 'Notes on the Sophiae, the Sophianae and the Harbour of Sophia', *B*, XXXVII (1967), 15ff. For Corippus's position in the *scrinia* see *Pan. Anast.* 42f., with notes.

27. E. Heitsch, *Die griechische Dichterfragmente* I<sup>2</sup> (1963), XL.1.

28. *App. carm.* 2 *Ad Iustinum et Sophiam Augustos*. See Cameron [n. 8].

29. *App. carm.* 2.39f.

30. Joh. Biclar., *Chron.*, a. 567(?).

31. *App. carm.* 2.23f.

32. P. 241 (ed. de Boor); cf. Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, XIV.10.

adornment of churches built by Justinian, including St. Sophia and the Holy Apostles.<sup>33</sup> On the strength of this, perhaps, Justin receives praise for his character (*μεγαλόψυχός τε καὶ εἰς πάντα ἐπιδέξιος*),<sup>34</sup> with no further comment. It was not surprising that the chronicle tradition should have picked up this theme, for Justin's patronage of religious art and building can be amply attested from the *Patria*;<sup>35</sup> he was especially associated with additions to the church at Blachernae and the provision of a reliquary for the Virgin's girdle at Chalcostrateia.<sup>36</sup> Besides the relic sent to Poitiers, he and Sophia presented a silver gilt cross to Rome, with busts of themselves on its arms and the Lamb of God in the middle.<sup>37</sup> Further, there is a distinct emphasis in this reign on religious developments, with the court apparently showing the way.<sup>38</sup> Justin was a devotee of the stylite St. Symeon the Younger, who foretold his accession to the future Patriarch John Scholasticus; the latter informed Justin and subsequently was greatly favoured by him. When Justin actually succeeded, he showed great devotion to Symeon and consulted him in everything; indeed, when Justin's daughter was possessed by a demon, the saint was able to cure her by letter.<sup>39</sup> At the same time John's predecessor and successor as Patriarch, Eutychius, also claimed to have foretold Justin's succession, and wished to 'strengthen him in the fear of God'.<sup>40</sup> But that Justin's piety was genuine is confirmed in details even by the basically hostile account of John of Ephesus, who writes on several occasions of

33. For the interpretation of Theophanes's remarks see Cameron [n. 19], note on *Iust.* IV.290f.

34. Loc. cit. [n. 32].

35. See John of Ephesus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCO Script. Syri, 3 ser., III [1936]), III.24, and *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, II, ed. Preger (1907), 229.4, 220.14, 263.11, 267.8, etc.

36. See R. Janin, *La Géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin* I.3: *Les Églises et les monastères*<sup>2</sup> (Paris, 1969), pp. 162f., 237f.

37. H. Pierce and R. Tyler, *L'Art byzantin* II (Paris, 1932), pls. 136, 199 b; D. Talbot Rice, *The Art of Byzantium* (London, 1959), no. 71; J. Beckwith, *The Art of Constantinople*<sup>2</sup> (London, 1968), pl. 55.

38. See E. Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images in the Period before Iconoclasm', *DOP*, VIII (1954), 83ff., esp. 121f.

39. *Life of St. Symeon the Younger*, ed. H. Delehaye (*Subsidia Hagiographica*, 14 [1923]), P. Van den Ven (ibid., 32.1 [1962]), chaps. 202–208; see also Symeon's letter to Justin, *MPG*, LXXXVI, col. 3215.

40. *MPG*, LXXXVI, col. 2349.

Justin paying particular honour and respect to certain Monophysite leaders, even during the time of persecution.<sup>41</sup> Again, Justin and Sophia felt strongly enough about the religious question to intervene personally in the examination of Monophysite convents.<sup>42</sup> And John, followed by Michael the Syrian, has high praise for Justin's aims in ecclesiastical policy at the beginning of his reign.<sup>43</sup> Basing himself on an outward aspect of Justin's activities, therefore, the chronicler Theophanes picked on a single trait. It is a trait missed by the political historians who focused on Justin's foreign policies, yet a trait of equal importance, which can be well documented elsewhere.

What of a serious assessment of Justin by contemporaries? Rubin constructed a theory according to which Agathias and Menander Protector were expressing official attitudes.<sup>44</sup> When Agathias, writing during the 570s, praises Justinian's war policies and criticizes the payment of subsidies to barbarians he is taken to be tacitly supporting Justin II in his abandonment of subsidies.<sup>45</sup> As the judgement of a serious historian, who intended to cover Justin's reign, though in the event he did not reach it,<sup>46</sup> this would be important. But it seems as though Agathias was writing the relevant section of his *History* in the reign of Tiberius, who did in fact return to subsidies, the disadvantages of Justin's policies having become glaringly obvious;<sup>47</sup> this puts a very different complexion on Agathias's supposed critique of Justin. Menander Protector, who continued Agathias's history in the reign of Maurice, gives the most serious treatment of Justin's foreign policy, and here it is indeed a favourable one.<sup>48</sup> Justin is presented as a strong

41. *HE*, II.3, cf. III.35.

42. *Ibid.*, I.10.

43. *Ibid.*, III.1.

44. *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, I, pp. 227f.

45. See Cameron, *Agathias*, p. 125.

46. See Agathias, *Hist.*, *pref.*, p. 10.19 (*CSHB*). Agathias did not conceive the idea of writing a history until after the accession of Justin II (*Pref.*, pp. 11.5f.), and in his main narrative he only reached the year 559; most probably he died about 580 with the *History* still unfinished (Cameron, *Agathias*, pp. 9f.).

47. See *Hist.* IV.29. Subsidies: A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, I (Oxford, 1964), p. 307.

48. On Menander see O. Veh, *Beiträge zu Menander Protector*, *Wiss. Beilage zum Jahresbericht 1954/5 des Humanistischen Gymnasium Fürth/Bayern* (1955).

emperor, dealing firmly with the arrogance of the Avars and adopting an uncompromising but not unrealistic stance towards Persia.<sup>49</sup> When he has occasion to refer to Justin's illness he does so in moderate terms, and without any moralizing explanations.<sup>50</sup> We know Menander's history largely from the *Excerpta de legationibus* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, which are necessarily limited in scope; from what Menander says himself, however, it is probably fair to assume that its scale would have been similar to that of Agathias.<sup>51</sup> He begins where Agathias left off,<sup>52</sup> and it is likely therefore that he gave a relatively balanced assessment of Justin (though omitting much of the material covered by the ecclesiastical historians). Like Corippus, he seems to have approved of Justin's treatment of the Avar embassy of A.D. 565,<sup>53</sup> and to have found nothing serious to criticize in Justin's foreign policy. It is striking, then, to find much the same approach in the work of John of Ephesus, who is so hostile to Justin on other grounds, as we shall see. John criticizes Justin for incompetence and treachery in the details of the conduct of the Persian war and in his dealings with the Arabs;<sup>54</sup> yet he does not condemn Justin's policies as such. Like Corippus and Menander, he describes the Avar embassy of 565, and although his version is somewhat more highly coloured than that of the sober Menander, he seems to approve of Justin's handling of the delegation.<sup>55</sup> It would seem, then, that there was indeed an atmosphere of general approval for what Justin was attempting in foreign policy, even if we cannot use Agathias as evidence. A later generation saw things differently; for Theophylact Simocatta, writing in the reign of Heraclius, the renewed Persian war had brought only defeat and disaster, for which Justin, as its originator, was responsible.<sup>56</sup>

49. See frags. 14, 28, 33, 36 (*FHG*, IV.218ff.).

50. Fr. 37.

51. See fr. 1 (Menander's preface).

52. Ibid.: ἀρξασθαι μετὰ τὴν ἀποβίωσιν τοῦ Ἀγαθίου, καὶ τῆς ἱστορίας . . . ποιήσασθαι τὴν ἀρχήν. The text surely needs emendation: see Müller, ad loc.

53. Fr. 14; cf. Corippus, *Iust.* III.151ff.

54. *HE*, VI, especially 2–6, 10, 14, etc.

55. *HE*, VI.24.

56. *Hist.*, III.9.



The most striking and the most partial contemporary opinions of Justin II and Tiberius are to be found in the *Ecclesiastical Histories* of the orthodox Evagrius, lawyer and advocate of the Patriarch Gregory of Antioch when he came to Constantinople in 588 to defend himself against the scandalous charge of paganism,<sup>57</sup> and the Monophysite bishop John of Ephesus, leader of the Monophysite bishops imprisoned and abused in Constantinople by Justin's orders;<sup>58</sup> somehow or other these opinions are reflected in the *History of the Franks* by Gregory of Tours.<sup>59</sup> In all three authors the two emperors are sharply contrasted; Tiberius's character is shown against the background of that of Justin, and must necessarily be a foil to it. Clearly there is considerable distortion, and the overall picture is too simplistic; our task is to indicate the underlying complexities.

Evagrius and Gregory offer cardboard characters. Justin is dominated by greed and luxury,<sup>60</sup> while Tiberius is merciful and generous.<sup>61</sup> The characterizations of the two emperors are in no way integral to Gregory's narrative and are wholly separable from their context. They must derive from a good Byzantine source, though it is hardly possible to say what it was.<sup>62</sup> But Evagrius too offers mere stereotypes, making little effort to provide a rounded picture of the policies and aims of the two emperors. It is clear that he is not giving us genuine criticism, but superficial clichés instead. Unlike John of Ephesus, he does not oppose Justin for religious reasons. On what then is the

57. Evagrius, *HE*, VI.7. On Gregory's trial see also John of Ephesus, *HE*, III.28f.; V.17 (gets off by large-scale bribery).

58. John's sufferings: *HE*, II.4–7; credentials as an eye-witness: I.22, 30; II.6, 18.

59. See Averil Cameron, 'The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXVI (1975), 421–26.

60. Evagrius, *HE*, V.1–2, 5 (Justin's motives for the deposition of Anastasius of Antioch), 11; Gregory, *Historia Francorum* IV.40 [hereafter *HF*].

61. Evagrius, *HE*, V.13; Gregory, *HF*, IV.40 (=Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* (MGH, Script. rer. Lang. [1878], III.11), V.19, 30 (=Paulus Diaconus, *HL*, III.11–12), VI.30 (Paulus Diaconus, *HL*, II.15).

62. G. F. Kurth, 'De l'autorité de Gregoire de Tours', *Études franques*, II (1919), 167, assumes that it derives from Byzantine ambassadors, but cannot name any suitable candidates. A written source seems to me possible (art. cit., n. 59 and n. 81 below).

criticism based? We can disentangle two separate threads—personal abuse and the *topos* of greed. The latter accusation has some foundation in fact, like Theophanes's statement of Justin's piety. Justin's inauguration speech reported by Corippus and a *Novel* of his first year demonstrate his concern for saving money;<sup>63</sup> he dismissed the Avars so as to avoid paying the large subsidies given to them by Justinian,<sup>64</sup> and John of Ephesus indicates the empress Sophia's concern for the treasury and her pride in the wealth which she and Justin had amassed.<sup>65</sup> The words which according to John she addressed to Tiberius reflect the credit side of a financial policy which could be seen in very different lights,<sup>66</sup> as we see from John's main narrative.<sup>67</sup> As the chronicle tradition focused on a single aspect of Justin's activity, while the political historians emphasized his foreign policy, so Evagrius, John and the source of Gregory picked on one particular feature—his attempt to restore the state finances. Evagrius's more personal abuse of Justin has a different explanation, rightly diagnosed by Tinnefeld.<sup>68</sup> It is associated with Justin's failure to recognize the merits of Evagrius's own patron, the Patriarch Gregory of Antioch; it was the loss of Dara to the Persians which drove Justin mad, and Evagrius blames the whole affair on Justin's refusal to listen to the advice of Gregory—because of his own arrogance and abandonment to pleasure and luxury.<sup>69</sup> Gregory survived scandal and suspicion in Antioch and Constantinople—by bribery, it was said—to become an envoy of Maurice in his negotiations with Chosroes II in 590.<sup>70</sup> Reading between the lines of John of Ephesus, it is clear that Tiberius had to some extent protected Gregory during the first throes of the witch-hunt of pagans which centred on Antioch in A.D. 579 and had its aftermath in a series of trials in Constantinople which went on through the 580s.<sup>71</sup> And so, as Gregory figures so large in the final pages of Evagrius, it is

63. Corippus, *Iust.* II.249f.; *Nov.* 148 (a. 566).

64. Stein [n. 2], 3f.

65. *HE*, III.11, 14, cf. V.20.

66. *Iust.* II.249f.

67. E.g. III.24; V.20; and for Sophia, III.10.

68. *Kaiserkritik* [n. 1], 45f.

69. *HE*, V.6–11.

70. Evagrius, *HE*, VI.17f.; Theophylact Simocatta, *Hist.*, IV.10f., esp. 14.

71. *HE*, III.28f.; Gregory's escape in 588—V.17.

Justin, who did not appreciate him, who is reviled, while Tiberius, apparently his protector, receives praise.

It is John of Ephesus who gives us by far the fullest account of Justin's reign, and John who suffered most in Justin's persecution of Monophysites.<sup>72</sup> Yet John's attitude to Justin, though hostile, is compassionate. He does not resort to Evagrius's stereotyped abuse. Justin and Sophia are real people who are seen in real situations—in disputation with Monophysite bishops, visiting religious communities to try to convert their inmates, influenced by powerful individuals and feeling the pangs of jealousy and indignation.<sup>73</sup> Justin's persecution of Monophysites is attributed largely to the twin influences of John Scholasticus and Anastasius;<sup>74</sup> his pathetic illness and Sophia's later discomfiture are ascribed to divine punishment for their folly,<sup>75</sup> certainly, but Justin's six 'good' years earn generous praise.<sup>76</sup> It is clear that John pitied Justin as well as condemned him; he had occasion to know him well<sup>77</sup> and was himself at the centre of the court circles that he describes so vividly. Unlike Evagrius, who was relatively unfamiliar with Constantinople, and would only have known of Justin by hearsay, John's credentials as historian of the reign were impeccable,<sup>78</sup> and his very full account, composed, as he tells us, under the greatest difficulty,<sup>79</sup> frequently gives us the material from which to counterbalance his own value judgements.

Such is the case with John's presentation of Tiberius II. Again we are presented elsewhere with a portrait which is to some extent a stereotype, and again this is most apparent in the

72. *HE*, II.5, 7f., 41, 50; III.15.

73. E.g. *HE*, I.5, 10, 33, 35, II.8 and *passim*.

74. See especially *HE*, II.25, 29.

75. III.2, 10.

76. III.1.

77. I.30; III.22.

78. I.22, 30; II.6, 18; III.22.

79. II.50: separate leaves of John's manuscript had to be concealed by his friends in different places for two or three years at a time; the result was that John himself had no copy of what he had written, and so frequently found himself describing the same thing twice or more. He says further that he was never able to revise and arrange the work at a late stage, and this affecting apology is certainly borne out by the confused arrangement of our text.

reports of Evagrius and Gregory. For Evagrius Tiberius is tall and handsome—by any standards, let alone the standards of emperors; but in addition he is merciful and gentle (*ἡπιός τε καὶ φιλόανθρωπος*), and above all generous to all comers, not merely according to their deserts, but as befits a Roman emperor.<sup>80</sup> We find strikingly similar comments in Gregory—Tiberius was ‘a man strenuous and helpful, wise, charitable and the best defender of the poor’.<sup>81</sup> Clearly Tiberius is being set as a foil to the disastrous Justin. But compare Corippus on Tiberius, who was already a protégé of Justin and had been made Count of the Excubitors before Justin’s accession: he was as yet comparatively untried, but Corippus introduces him as a young man (*iuuenis*) totally devoted to the welfare of the imperial court, wholly loyal and reliable.<sup>82</sup> The *Life* of the Patriarch Eutychius, restored in 577 to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, also mentions Tiberius with honour; Eutychius not only claimed to have foretold Tiberius’s accession (as he did those of Justin and Maurice), but even to have introduced him to Justin in the first place.<sup>83</sup> As a protector of Eutychius the Emperor Tiberius is favourably presented by the saint’s biographer—though it is very clear that the patriarch did all that he could to keep on good terms with each of the reigning emperors in turn. But more important and more serious than this are the occasional remarks of Theophylact Simocatta, and John of Ephesus’s allusions to Tiberius’s military preoccupations.<sup>84</sup> This was where his main activity and main achievement lay.<sup>85</sup> But as with Justin, contemporary criticism focused on his personal qualities. Again John of Ephesus gives the fullest information, and again his narrative indicates that Tiberius’s activities could be seen in different lights. John tells us that he knew Tiberius well from his youth at the court of Justin;<sup>86</sup> he testifies to his

80. *HE*, V.13.

81. *HF*, V.19, cf. IV.40, VI.30. The Latinized *aelimosinis* (VI.30) and *elimosinarium* (IV.40, VI.19) strongly suggest a written, and probably a Greek source.

82. *Iust.* I.212f., IV.253.

83. *MPG*, LXXXVI. col. 2349; cf. col. 2380.

84. Theophylact, *Hist.* I.3; III.16. John of Ephesus, *HE*, III.21, 25.

85. See Bury, *LRE*<sup>1</sup> II [n. 2], 80.

86. III.22.

continuing frankness, gentleness and humility.<sup>87</sup> Sophia entertained hopes of marrying him, and he treated her with respect, as perhaps he had to, though he could be firm when necessary.<sup>88</sup> At his succession he was able to anticipate a dangerous plot,<sup>89</sup> and he seems to have refused to allow the persecution which followed the outbreak of paganism in 579 to be carried to the limits that some would have wished.<sup>90</sup> John often refers to his absorption in the continuing wars as a factor which limited his domestic activity.<sup>91</sup> When he agreed to allow Monophysite persecution it was only with reluctance,<sup>92</sup> or so John says to protect his hero, and John's *History* also puts the best possible light on Tiberius's persecution of Arians;<sup>93</sup> he was merely 'giving way to the popular thirst'. Yet John's own narrative makes it clear that in ordering the persecution Tiberius was actually trying to clear himself of seeming to look favourably on the request of his Gothic recruits and their families to establish an Arian church in Constantinople. There is little positive assessment of his short reign. By far the most prominent theme in John's treatment of Tiberius is his generosity, and here the critique is at its crudest. John comments more than once on the extent of Tiberius's largess, a theme which, as we have seen appears also in Evagrius.<sup>94</sup> Gregory has it too,<sup>95</sup> and a *Novel* of 575 shows that it was part of a deliberate policy.<sup>96</sup> But even to Tiberius's supporters such generosity could seem like reckless extravagance,<sup>97</sup> and again John indicates the kind of arguments used by the other side. Even when Justin was alive and Tiberius was only Caesar his lack of concern for the state finances had caused serious concern, and Justin and Sophia had 'scolded him sharply', withdrawn the keys of the treasury and put him on a fixed allowance.<sup>98</sup> Sophia's

87. *Ibid.*, a passage written in A.D. 581.

88. III.9–10, 24.

89. Gregory *HF*, V.30.

90. John of Ephesus, *HE*, III.31–33 (though III.30 seems critical of Tiberius).

91. III.21.

92. *Ibid.*

93. III.25.

94. John, *HE*, III.11, 14; V.20; cf. Evagrius, *HE*, V.13.

95. *HF*, V.19.

96. *Nov.* 163 (a. 575).

97. See especially *HE*, V.20; III.14.

98. III.11.

later remonstrances with him on the same subject are also reported by John in detail,<sup>99</sup> and were evidently well known, for Gregory has them too.<sup>100</sup> Sophia must have had her defenders, especially in her unsuccessful contest for status with Tiberius's obscure but legal wife Ino,<sup>101</sup> and this is again dimly visible even amid the hostility of John's narrative. In the same way while ostensibly criticizing Justin and supporting Tiberius, John lets us see that there was an alternative version sympathetic to the one and critical of the other.<sup>102</sup> It would be fascinating to know where Gregory found his character sketches of Justin and Tiberius, and in particular the circumstantial details which he alone gives about the plotting which nearly prevented Tiberius's assumption of complete power;<sup>103</sup> he could hardly have derived them from Evagrius or John of Ephesus, both of whom were still writing in the reign of Maurice.<sup>104</sup> As it is, these three historians together demonstrate (Evagrius and Gregory dimly and fitfully, John in great detail) the complexities of political criticism in Constantinople.

## II

Byzantine *Kaiserkritik* is not a simple concept. In Byzantium, as in every state at all periods, people held differing views about the policies and characters of their rulers. These natural differences are exacerbated in our sources by literary considerations. There are many questions about the period which we have been considering to which we shall never know the answers—the truth, for example, about the sensational conspiracy of Aetherius and Addaeus in 566, evidently too embarrassing to relate in detail<sup>105</sup>—and in part this is because of the nature of the sources. Not only are the literary sources widely different in their viewpoints: we must also be careful which *kind* of source

99. III.14.

100. *HF*, V.19.

101. John, *HE*, III.7f.

102. At one point John finds himself defending Tiberius against those who thought him too passive—III.22, and cf. III.30.

103. *HF*, V.30.

104. Evagrius, *HE*, VI.24 (A.D. 594); John, *HE*, V.14 (A.D. 583).

105. Corippus, *Iust.* I.60–1; Evagrius, *HE*, V.3; Eustrat., *V. Eutych.*, *MPG*, LXXXVI, col. 2361.

we use as the basis of our analysis. History writing was still divided basically between those who concentrated on wars and diplomacy and those who wrote the history of the Church. Evagrius, it is true, drew heavily on Procopius's *Wars*, and John of Ephesus included in his *Ecclesiastical History* an account of the military affairs of his period. But a historian who would unite external and internal matters into a unified whole into which difficult considerations of classicism would not obtrude themselves was still lacking. Nobody yet (though John of Ephesus came nearest to it) could cope remotely adequately with the realities of the Byzantine state in the later sixth century. Nobody saw its problems as a whole and consequently nobody attempted a serious assessment of the contribution of an individual emperor. Value judgements in different authors vary in scope according to the literary type of the work in which they are contained, and within these limitations even the most valuable authors have recourse to clichés and stereotypes. To concentrate on the traditionalist historians who still followed the classical model of focusing on wars and diplomacy is to be misled by what seems to us to be the dominant influence of Procopius. Modern scholars approaching the study of the sixth century invariably do so through Procopius, above all through the *Secret History*, in such a way that it seems to be the pattern and model of all Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*. In fact, however, it is very doubtful whether it was generally known until much later.<sup>106</sup> This is not the place to go into further detail about the *Secret History*, which despite recent work remains in sore need of a fresh approach.<sup>107</sup> But it can be said at this point both that the categories and approach of the *Secret History* are in many ways idiosyncratic and untypical and that the reigns immediately following that of Justinian produced a lively political debate which owed little to the attitudes of an earlier generation. Justinian's long and spectacular reign, like that of Queen Victoria, must have seemed to mark the end of an era, but it did not, I suspect, mesmerize contemporaries as completely as we have allowed ourselves to think.

106. B. Rubin, *Prokopios von Kaisareia* (Stuttgart, 1954), p. 253. Evagrius certainly used the *Wars* extensively, but it is not proven that he knew the *Secret History* (cf. Rubin, art. cit. [n. 1], 456).

107. Which I hope to give in a forthcoming book.

All the same, in classicizing and non-classicizing sources alike, certain general and recurring patterns of thought do emerge. Not even the best contemporary critics were able to throw off the habit of interpreting politics in terms of the personal behaviour of the emperor. Neither an ambitious writer and *littérateur* such as Procopius, nor an involved ecclesiastic like John of Ephesus could reach beyond the personal. And the personal was itself presented in terms of stereotyped expectations. How deeply this mentality was ingrained can be seen from the early sixth-century *Oracle of Baalbek*, which in its 'prophecy' promises that the Emperor Zeno's rule 'will be pleasing to the entire people; he will love the Poor and will humble the Powerful and Rich'.<sup>108</sup> He will be followed by Anastasius, who is 'noble, terrifying, high-souled and free (*μεγαλόψυχος καὶ ἐλεύθερος*) and hates all the beggars'.<sup>109</sup> What matters is the character of the emperor ('good' or 'bad') and his character manifests itself at home above all in his financial policies (so we have Justin II, the 'miser' and Tiberius II, the 'generous' or the 'prodigal'). I would go further and suggest that when an emperor came to the throne he was in turn himself impelled by the need to act out the rôle demanded of him by the expectations of his subjects; the Byzantine Emperor was the living image of God, but he also had a secular rôle to play, and this rôle was conceived as consisting above all of two elements—the financial on the domestic front and the military in external affairs. Contemporary criticism of Justin II and Tiberius exactly illustrates these ideological limitations to the emperor's rôle. And in real terms, contemporary expectations brought a response from the emperors themselves, in the form of repayment of debts, remission of taxes, or (abroad) refusal or payment of subsidies, for which in turn the emperors were criticized and on the basis of which they were evaluated. When Justin II repaid Justinian's debts and released prisoners from jail he was acting out the rôle of a Byzantine Emperor just as surely as when he assumed the insignia of power. And as we can see from Menander Protector, the element of rôle-playing was paradoxically at its most acute

108. *The Oracle of Baalbek*, ed. P. J. Alexander (Washington, 1967), pp. 159–61, trans., p. 27.

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 167–8.



in the area where realism was most needed—that of foreign relations.

Thesis and antithesis—Byzantine *Kaiserkritik* proceeded along a zigzag course as the characters of individual emperors oscillated between ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Occasionally we encounter a personal judgement of a less limited kind, but there were many rocks on which Byzantine political criticism was likely to founder, and of these that of the Procopian tradition was perhaps the least important.

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